

4 LONG-HAUL LESBIAN COUPLES: HOW THEY DO IT

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

May 2003

Girlfriends

THE BUFFY LEGACY

How a Vampire Slayer and
Two Witches Changed Lesbian TV

PLUS: Tara talks from the grave

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Sarah Michelle Gellar,
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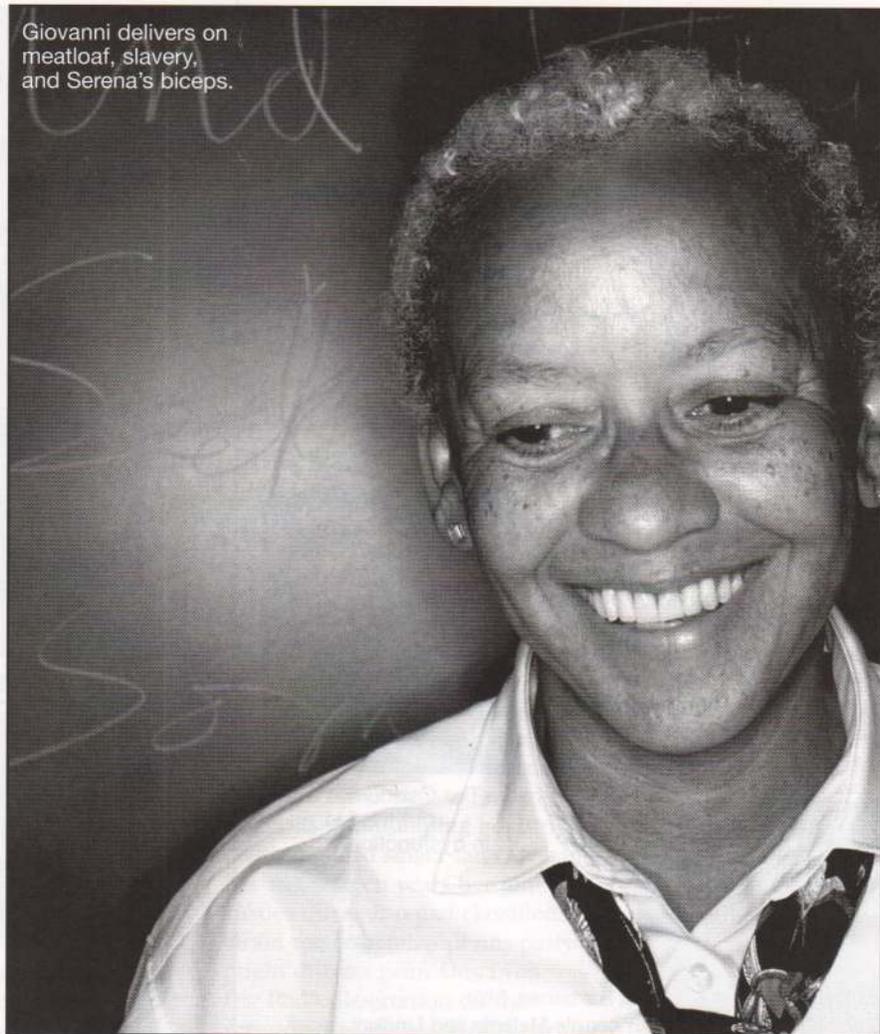


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Giovanni delivers on meatloaf, slavery, and Serena's biceps.



Well-Versed

With *Quilting the Black-eyed Pea*, Nikki Giovanni is sewing circles around the competition.

Poet Nikki Giovanni has been an impossible-to-silence advocate for civil rights—including ours—since the 1960s, wielding her proverbial pen as a weapon in the political struggle against injustice. These days she's suiting up in dapper ties and white-collared shirts for the spoken-word circuit and promoting her latest book of "poems and not-quite-poems," *Quilting the Black-eyed Pea*.

The new collection touches on a wide spectrum of material, from NASA to the journey of a slave ship, from Emmett Till to 9/11's effect on dogs. It contains tributes to Rosa Parks and Harry Potter, recipes for meatloaf, letters to jailbirds, prayers to dying doves, and an ode to feet. Giovanni grasps how we must rely on

humanity and dignity to withstand and to fight the inhumane. She shares humor, eroticism, family history, righteous anger, and personal insight.

Despite her soft butch getup of late, Giovanni's early work sexualized black men with Lil' Kim-style raunch. But the unmarried mother has always held nontraditional views on the straight status quo: "Around twenty-five or thirty you say, maybe men and women aren't meant to live with each other."

Giovanni's current female "housemate," Ginney, figures into a couple of her new pieces, particularly "A Deer in Headlights," which deals with Giovanni's recent bout with cancer. In the prose poem, the women are shopping in the produce aisle when

Nikki announces, "My left tit just fell off. I stood gingerly, waiting to hear the teacup sort of tinkle that I expected would be the sound of one tit falling. I waited. Ginney walked back to me. 'Your tit did not fall. Look down. There is no tit there.'"

Whatever her sexual preference, it's clear Giovanni appreciates strong, like-minded gals. While discussing Title IX, Giovanni confesses, "I love Serena [Williams] because Serena is muscled up. Serena has definition...she had that cat suit on at the U.S. open. What [she's] saying to women is, 'You should use your physical gifts, in terms of developing muscles, to take care of yourself. To be in tune and in touch. Your body was not just made for some guy to hump.'" —**Candace Moore**

Ladies of the Canyon

The lesbian director of *High Art* returns to the theme of irresistible temptation.

by Candace Moore

Lisa Cholodenko is good at getting to the crux of infidelity, right down to the sweaty-necked thrills and dragon-sized guilt-highs of no-no naughtiness. With *Laurel Canyon*, the Sundance-crowned director crafts her second full-length meditation on what drives committed partners to stray.

Perhaps she's working up a series. Cholodenko's first feature, *High Art*, spun the sexual exploits of an artsy twenty-something (Radha Mitchell) who succumbs to a Brothers-Grimm-esque lull of snorting smack and the gaunt-cheekboned appeal of a dyke photo-artist (swarthy Ally

Sheedy), all to the chagrin of her blonde boyfriend. *High Art* was a stunning, tasty downer. *Laurel*

Canyon is more mature, sometimes the same way doing laundry is. Not that that's entirely a bad thing. Cholodenko's intentions are sound and her characters real. The lesbian director again explores desire from its onset, portraying ripe-for-experimentation innocents who give over to discovery without a fight, alongside the free-love old hats who unhinge them.

When brawny med-school grad Sam (Christian Bale) brings his Harvard-bred fiancée Alex (Kate Beckinsale of *Cold Comfort Farm*) home to Los Angeles to begin his residency at a psych ward, nothing quite goes as planned. The sprawling, hippie-style Laurel Canyon house his mom Jane (Frances McDormand) promised to vacate for the dual-doctorates is teeming with the bong tokes and

lewd jokes of a Brit-pop band. An accomplished record producer, seemingly untouched since the seventies, Jane's still roaming about in cutoff AC/DC tees and leather pants, "feeling" the band's new single in the backyard studio, mixing morning cocktails, and humping boyishly charming lead singer Ian (Alessandro Nivola), sixteen years her junior. Sam rustles through rental classifieds, afraid the bohemian perma-party might distract prim Alex from her Ph.D. dissertation on the reproductive behavior of the fruit fly. Little does he know she's curious about, if not smitten with, his eccentric mother dearest.

McDormand, as open, unapologetic, and ballsy Jane, is the holy grail of this film. We understand why Alex must seek her out; we do in every scene. She's three jiggers sex to one spoonful of milk. At first it's disarming to see the clucky cop from *Fargo* in from the snow, thin and twisting her long, blond Marianne Faithfull locks with a knowing smirk, but McDormand convinces us she's been cool all along.

Jane, who has admittedly had a legion of past lovers, both male and female, toys with Alex's shyness without out-and-out seducing her son's fiancée. Her boy-toy Ian, however, with cocky rock star splendor, plainly encourages Alex to take off her top. Needless to say, with the aid of whiskey sours, a nude threesome of deep kissing (including some lengthy makeout vignettes between the two girls) gets the pool heated, and their tryst gets pushed further, until someone gets hurt.

Laurel Canyon is more than a heady flingfest with a curt ending, it's also a love letter to its namesake. Cholodenko's camera caresses Los Angeles's canyon country, its red succulents and floppy greenery, the rows of mountain mailboxes, the hawks, the reefer, the rock-n-roll, and the swimming pool revelry. Heck, even the Chateau Marmont (mainstay of Hollywood's Leonardos and Britneys) has a cameo.

Beyond the hedonism, director Lisa Cholodenko smartly examines the ways in which cheating isn't cut and dry, how an affair, for example, in which two people barely touch may



Sexy, swinging Frances McDormand is queen of the Canyon.

be more damaging, and unfaithful, than an orgy. Sometimes the words we use to describe wanting make all the difference. Grade: **B-**

Candace Moore works as a publications editor for UCLA and resides in Silverlake.

Watching by the Box

Revisit your favorite TV series with new box-sets.

by **Candace Moore**

Relive the cordon bleu (or franks and beans) of reality television. Metal rocker Ozzy Osbourne and family



The Osbournes put the fun in dysfunctional.

The Osbournes: The First Season

dir. Todd Stevens, C.B. Harding
Miramax Home Entertainment, 520 min.

are fascinating, potty-mouthed subjects, artfully captured by lesbian camera operators Katherine Brooks and Jennifer Lane. Watching their battles against their tiny dogs' carpet doo-doo, neighbor's kumbayas, and long-held substance abuse problems confirms that whether in the berths of Beverly Hills or halfway through a bottle of Boone's Strawberry Hill, we are all lovably

screwed up. The Osbournes know how to show the subset of bad taste considered cool. They could whip the Loud family into simpering submission. Grade: **A**

Queer as Folk:

The Complete Second Season (Showtime Entertainment, 2003)

QAF's producers introduced lesbian couple Melanie and Lindsay, plus their newborn, Gus, in the first season of Showtime's serial homodrama. But the girls' sex life, compared to the body bumping of *Liberty Avenue's* gay boys, seemed couched. Fortunately, in year two, Mel and Linz cast aside the baby bottles and get hot 'n' heavy *on* the couch. We see glimpses of Mel's motorcycle-riding, power tool-wielding, porn-star side, and a marriage proposal calls for a bachelorette party, complete with dildo-strapped strippers. See all twenty episodes on DVD—*QAF* is less cheesy and more engrossing when the episodes are watched in succession. Grade: **A-**

Buffy the Vampire Slayer :

The Complete Third Season (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003)

Buffy Summers's senior year at Sunnydale High is full of team-effort demon buttkicking and witty asides. Creator Joss Whedon's TV show, a horror genre metaphor for the teenage experience of being different in the face of a cruel world, gets more intricate with every stake through the heart. Wicca neophyte Willow (Alyson Hannigan) hasn't come out of the closet yet in this pre-Tara era, but we get clued in to her intrinsic predilection for cute girls in the "Doppelgänger" episode, when her leather-clad vampire double licks every soft neck in sight. Grade: **A+**

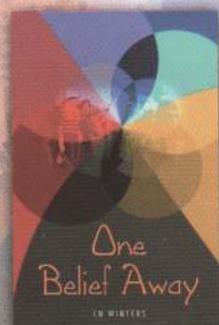
OZ: The Complete Second Season (HBO Video, 2002)

Full of explicit gay sex, *OZ* may rank as one of the most addictive, intelligent, and challenging action series to grace cable. A gal can't help but root for convicts Keller (Christopher Meloni) and Beecher (Lee Tergesen) in season two, as the queer Emerald City inmates fall in love. But forgive me, *OZ* fans: this *Jacob's Ladder*-reminiscent prison drama is not for the faint of heart—what with the gouging-out of eyes, biting off of members, and other gory, gory visuals. Wonderfully scripted, nice ensemble acting (including angelic, precise B.D. Wong), but ultimately not everyone's cup of tea for a cozy night under the covers. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore works as a Publications Editor for UCLA and resides in Silverlake.

From CN Winters, author of "Irrefutable Evidence" comes "One Belief Away."

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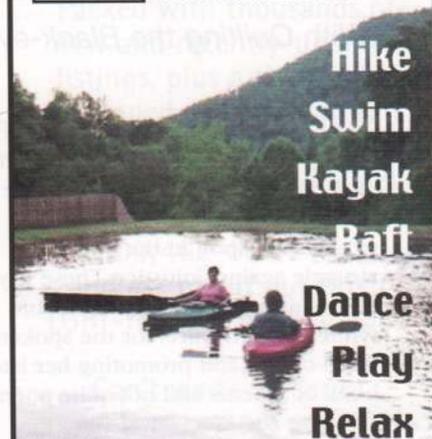


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Losing a Soldier

Last spring I was in a New York City bar with novelist Sarah Schulman. We drank whiskey, critiqued the play we'd just seen (*Elle* with Alan Cumming), and were catching up on mutual friends when Sarah dropped her voice and said, "Sarah Pettit is really sick, you know."



The late Sarah Pettit (left), Diane Barton, and me, 1994.

I couldn't believe it. More exactly, I wouldn't believe it. The last time I'd seen Sarah Pettit we were dancing the night away at the East Village dyke dive, Meow Mix. Sarah had reached the top of the masthead at *Out*, which she co-founded, and was enjoying the company of artist Nicole Eisenmann and Marissa Cardinale, the executive director of Robert Mapplethorpe's estate. Sarah was always introducing me to lesbians whose work still thrills me and teaches me something about being gay in this world.

Not long after that night, a coup at *Out* sent Sarah packing. The official word was that her management style was "gruff" and her focus was "too political." (I immediately recognized these as code words for "lesbian.") *Out* hired some bald, pointy-eared moron of an editor from a mediocre British fashion magazine, and therein ended its glory days. Under Sarah, *Out* was the first gay rag to spend its mainstream advertising revenues nurturing top-notch journalism. I remember, for example, when Sarah sent Sally Chew to Richmond, Virginia, to cover the 1997 lesbian gang murder, the one that the rest of American media either ignored, or couldn't fathom, or both. And I don't have to mention that under Sarah's stewardship, *Out's* coverage of men and women was, by fiat, fifty-fifty.

Fatefully, Sarah one-upped her enemies at *Out* by landing a juicy senior editorship at *Newsweek*—and thus became the most powerful openly gay person in mainstream magazine publishing, next to *Rolling Stone's* more understated founder, Jann Wenner. After a nine-month battle with lymphoma, Sarah died this January. She was thirty-six. That's why I won't believe it. She was too young. More importantly, she was too significant. It saddens me to think how far gay publishing will be set back because we won't have a sixty-year-old Sarah Pettit, a lesbian Catherine Graham of sorts, to show us the way.

Donations in her memory can be sent to the Sarah Pettit Fund, Yale Development Office, P.O. Box 2038, New Haven, Connecticut, 06521-2038 or online at www.yale.edu/development/how/online.html.

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Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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